Netwatch

BY JIM CARROLL

YOUR GUIDE TO BUSINESS & ACCOUNTING ON THE INTERNET

The landscape of change

My high-tech life is starting to become quite stressful. I just got my oldest son a cellphone: it seems de rigueur for high-school students to be technologically equipped.

Right away, he started sending text messages to me. I've never really "texted," haven't got into instant messaging and still find online chats a strange experience. I quickly discovered that texting from my new BlackBerry Pearl was a bit of a challenge — just where are my reading glasses?

That's not the only area in which I'm wondering if I've suddenly become a technological dunderhead. I recently joined the online 3-D digital world Second Life to check out the hype about virtual worlds, but still haven't managed to make my way off Help Island. Not for lack of trying; when I tried to change my avatar I suddenly found myself wearing a purple chicken suit and my 12-year-old burst out laughing. Then there are the social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace. I keep getting invitations to become friends with people I've never met. I don't have a page on either site as I keep busy enough with my blog and e-mail. But my son teases me saying, "Dad, you've got no friends."

It's not like I'm new at this stuff: I sent my first e-mail in 1982, was on the Internet by 1989 and have probably used every generation of computer and operating system that has ever existed. But now, things seem different with technology — it's all happening faster than ever.

You can see the impact all around. Do you own an original Apple iPod? Five years old, it's kind of big and clunky, and you're probably embarrassed to carry it around. What about an original BlackBerry? Doesn't it seem like it's from the olden days? And what about that cool back-lit projection TV that was so leading-edge three years ago? Now it's positively ancient.

With such rapid change come innovative business applications, new data sources and fascinating new careers. I often quote an Australian study that suggests 50% of the kids in preschool today will work in a job or career that does not yet exist. Much of this is happening as people marry an existing professional skill set with emerging technologies, which then blossoms into a new career.

I'm witnessing the phenomenon firsthand. After giving a keynote address recently at a US property and casualty insurance conference, a fellow came up and told me about his work as a "location-intelligence professional." He has linked his underwriting and risk-assessment background to the massive location-oriented databases on crime statistics, weather patterns, property values and other factors, to provide for a new way of assessing insurance risk. Lo and behold, a career is born.

So it is with accountants. Our role will evolve in countless ways as new technologies come to the forefront. Much of what we do will disappear into a maelstrom of automation. Capital asset accounting will become self-manageable, with entire classes of fixed assets reporting in on a regular basis as to their status, location and state of operating health. Inventory systems will largely run themselves, allowing us to focus more on analysis and less on record keeping. Billing and collection and payment systems will become far more automated than they are today.

The question remains, how do we evolve our careers to ride the next waves of technology? The concept of the location intelligence professional may provide a clue; perhaps there are many others. The key thing to keep in mind is that change is going to continue to hit us faster than we think.

Jim Carroll, FCA, is a well-known speaker, author and columnist. Reach him at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com or log on to his website at www.jimcarroll.com

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Slashgeo: Intersection for Spatial People
http://slashgeo.org

The Location Intelligence Blog
http://blog.mapinfo.com

All Points Blog: The Weblog for Location Technology & GIS www.allpointsblog.com